

Critical Research FAQ for San Diego State University Researchers

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What constitutes critical research?

Critical experiments are those for which suspension of the research would cause irreparable harm to the project. For example:

Time critical - there may be a limited window for data collection over an extended period of time -- e.g. data must be collected on specific dates within a year and substantial time has already been invested acquiring data for the project; research subjects may have only specific times when they can be tested for a study; characterization of a specific plant growth stage is needed for incorporation into a long-term study which has been in progress for multiple years

What if my research is non-critical?

Non-essential research should either be done remotely or deferred until health conditions change.

Examples of non-critical research that should be paused could include experiments where intermediate products could be stored until a later date, new experiments that have not started yet, or continuing efforts to build new devices. Consider using the SDSU Research Pause Checklist to prepare your lab for this period.

Who is considered essential personnel?

Individuals who are essential to carry out critical research or critical duties including those who are:

1. Responsible for maintaining the viability of research subjects, including the well-being of animals in vivarium and non-vivarium facilities.
2. Research personnel who are needed to preserve highly perishable, and difficult to replace research materials (e.g. primary cell lines that cannot be stored), such that considerable time and costs would be associated with their loss.
3. Individuals who are responsible for regular maintenance of equipment that, if not done, could result in damage to the equipment and/or extraordinary cost.
4. Researchers working on experiments that have a small window for completion — for example, data collection might be required in the immediate time-frame as a long-term

experiment comes to fruition or for research that relies on the ability to make specific measurements only at certain times a year.

5. Research critical to helping address the COVID-19 health crisis.
6. Research where a pause in the research will negatively impact the care of participants on a clinical trial.

Can the PI designate students and postdocs as essential personnel?

No. Graduate students, and post-doctoral researchers cannot be identified exclusively as essential personnel by the PI. Undergraduate research students and volunteers are not considered essential personnel, although certain undergraduate employees may be considered essential if they are responsible for functions defined in the previous section. The decision to work on critical research projects on-campus during this period is the decision of the student worker or post-doc, without fear of repercussions.

Why are we asking for researchers to evaluate their studies as critical or non-critical?

We understand the challenges with pausing active research programs. However, we are facing an unprecedented challenge with COVID-19 and must all do our part to flatten the growth curve to protect our community and lessen pressures on our public health infrastructure. If you have questions, please contact your dean for guidance.